

Safety Considerations

As a caregiver, it can be difficult to recognize changes that occur slowly in the person with Parkinson's over time. If Parkinson's symptoms begin to significantly affect mobility, memory or thinking skills, it may be time to consider if it is still safe for your loved one to perform tasks that he or she once did easily as part of the daily routine.

While each person experiences Parkinson's differently, it is important to know that even familiar tasks can become difficult or unsafe for your loved one to continue. Making these changes can be difficult, so it is important for caregivers to acknowledge these losses and offer support as needed. Here are some examples:

Driving

Loss of flexibility in the neck and trunk, reduced reaction time and changes in ability to multi-task may affect your loved one's driving safety. Though it may be difficult to broach this topic, it is important to be realistic and seek medical advice and input if you notice changes. Occupational therapists are often involved in performing objective driving assessments and can offer recommendations based on their findings.

Use of power tools

Tremor combined with balance and coordination changes can impact safe use of power tools, even if your loved one has used them for a long time. Slowed reaction time can also add to safety concerns. Consider all these factors when helping your loved one determine if using power tools continues to be safe.

Kitchen appliances

Cooking is often a multi-step process, and a person with Parkinson's may begin to have difficulty managing kitchen tasks safely. Balance changes can make opening refrigerator and oven doors difficult, and falls can occur when attempting to reach high shelves or carry objects from counter to table. You may need to change how the person with Parkinson's participates in the kitchen.

Climbing

Reductions in balance skills and protective reflexes increase falls risk in people with PD. Attempts to climb on ladders, step stools or other apparatus should be avoided, which may result in changes to tasks regularly performed in the house or yard.



HOME SAFETY TOUR CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to ensure that your home is safe and easily accessible.

Throughout the House

- Floors are stable, non-skid surfaces without excessive patterns.
- There is good lighting throughout the home, with no dark or shadowy areas.
- Walking paths are wide, allowing easy access and use of a walker or wheelchair if needed.
- Electrical/phone/computer cords do not pose a tripping/falls risk when walking and moving about.
- Stairs are in good shape, have railings and can be blocked for safety if needed.
- Chairs are stable, have arm rests and adequate seat height to make standing up easier.
- Dining area can be easily accessed.
- A communication system is in place to allow you to hear the person with Parkinson's in another area of the house.

TO DO

- Remove throw rugs/scatter rugs.
- Remove clutter to decrease risk of tripping and falls.
- Store medication in a safe place.

Bedroom

- Environment is quiet and relaxing.
- Bed height allows feet to touch floor when seated at bedside.
- Half side rail or bed pole is in place to assist rolling and getting up.
- A nightlight is easily accessible and bright enough to fully light the path to the bathroom.
- A bedside commode/urinal is available for nighttime use if needed.
- A communication system or monitor is in place, so you can hear calls for help at night.

TO DO

- Place slippery fabric or a draw sheet on the middle third of the bed to make rolling easier.
- Remove the top sheet; instead, use a lightweight comforter.
- Avoid flannel sheets and nightwear.

Bathroom

- Grab bars are installed near the toilet, tub and shower: no location should require use of towel racks, faucets or soap dishes as grab bars.
- Toilet has an elevated seat and arm rests or grab bar within easy reach.
- Tub/shower has a sturdy bench with back support for bathing/shower safety.
- Seating is available if needed when performing tasks like brushing teeth, shaving etc.
- A communication system or monitor is in place, if needed, so you can hear calls for help.